Interview with Louis T. Olom

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LOUIS T. OLOM

Interviewed by: G. Lewis Schmidt

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Q: This is Lew Schmidt interviewing Lou Olom in his home in Falls Church, Virginia, on July 12, 1989. Lou, I'd like to start this interview by spending a few minutes on your giving us a background as to what your education was, how you started in your professional life, and what got you into the Agency in the first place. Then we'll take your career from there and go sequentially into what you did after you came into USIA. Why don't you start and give me a little bit of back ground of how you got going.

Bio-sketch and Education

OLOM: I came out of Chicago. I spent three and a half years at the University of Chicago trying to complete a pre-medical course, and decided by 1937 that that wasn't possible. I would not have been able to go on to medical school. I moved over into the social sciences and decided that I was going to get a degree in political science. While studying for the bachelor's exam at the University, I ran across a number of fascinating, stimulating volumes by a man named Harold Lasswell whose doctoral dissertation entitled Propaganda Technique During World War I became the classic in the field. When I read it, I thought, “My God. This man is extraordinary.”

After the bachelor's exam I made inquiries about him and whether he could be seen, for I wanted to meet him. I had read so many of his books by that time. I was told he was in China and that, if I did well on the bachelor's, they might see fit to help me come back and meet the great Dr. Harold Lasswell (who at that time was all of 35!). He was due back from China in January or February of 1938. Well, he did come back from China. He had been through the Nanking bombing and had lots of interesting tales about that event. I went up to see him and I told him that I had been waiting for almost a year to meet him, that I had read his books, and that I thought what he was trying to do was tremendous. He then asked questions about my past academic pursuits. I said they were primarily in the biological sciences which I loved dearly, but that the physical sciences and I didn't get along well at all, I had had a hell of a time getting through chemistry and physics.

He said, “Well, where have you been? I've been looking for you all my life. Why don't you come and take some of my courses?” which I did. I took courses in public opinion and propaganda, and psychological warfare, a course entitled non-rational factors in political behavior, the psychology of international politics, personality, power and opinion—you name it, I took them all. I because a student and devotee of Lasswell's. His followers were almost cult-like in their advocacy and defense of his new approaches to the study of man. Even the Soviets referred to Lasswell as “the world's leading bourgeois social scientist”!

I also worked as a research assistant to Charles Merriam in the field of political leadership and I was on my way to getting a doctorate in political science. In 1940 I took the 5-day “prelims,” passed them and actually got started on a dissertation which was going to be under Merriam. The title was to be The Study of Leadership As A General Phenomenon. Mr. Merriam, who was a compassionate man of wide ranging interests in the field of political sciences, had written a little book on four political leaders many years ago. He was fascinated with the inter-disciplinary character of the problem—indeed, of all problems—and how one can focus all of the disciplines—psychology, psychoanalysis, psychiatry, psychobiology, sociology, and political science—upon the phenomenon of leadership.

Departure From Academic Study to Accept Workwith Lasswell in New York

Well, it stimulated the hell out of me, too, and so I pursued it. Fortunately or unfortunately, in December of 1940, thanks to Dr. Lasswell with whom I had remained in contact, I received a fellowship from the Rockefeller Foundation to go to New York City in order to work with Lasswell. I should say that Lasswell had left the University before that time to join the Washington Psychiatric Foundation, created by Sullivan, who was one of the pioneers in the field. Together, they produced a new magazine entitled Psychiatry: A Journal of Inter-Personal Relations", which I think is still around.

Although Lasswell maintained his relationship with the Psychiatric Foundation, he left Washington for New York City where under the sponsorship of the Rockefeller people he developed a technique which later became known as "content analysis." In July of 1940 I left Chicago to go to New York and join Harold and a young man named Thomas Whiteside whom he imported from Canada. Tom was an ex-AP photographer and correspondent for the Toronto Star. With his practical news- paper experience in the background and my academic orientation in the then theory of mass communication, Lasswell thought we would go ahead and see what could be done by way of developing this whole new field which he had created, the field of "content analysis."

We used the British press as a sample during the summer of 1940. Tom and I would work in the New York Public Library, going through about a half-dozen British newspapers. We all had realized that there was a possibility of the United States becoming involved in the European war that had begun in September of 1939. Lasswell felt it would be important to start looking into all aspects of propaganda, having written his classic on World War I propaganda. He had also co-authored a book entitled World Revolutionary Propaganda an analysis of the strategy and tactics of communist propaganda.

The Move to Washington, 1940, to Work on Lasswell's"Content Analysis," Studying Wartime Propaganda

Library of Congress

We worked intensely for about five months in New York City. By the end of November of 1940 we were able to demonstrate to the Rockefeller Foundation's satisfaction that there was something significant in this field, and that it needed further exploration and development. As a result, the Foundation contributed $150,000—which doesn't sound like much now but was a whale of a lot of money then—to the Library of Congress for the expansion, extension and experimental development of this kind of enterprise. (You can see the successful commercial application of this technique today in Naisbet's “megatrends” books, and business!)

Lasswell, Olom, and Whiteside picked up their shoes and clothes and moved to Washington, D.C. where we established ourselves in what was called at that time the new Library Annex—that pure white building right across the street from the old Library. Lasswell hired a fellow named Jessie McKnight whom you may know. Jessie became our administrator. With Jessie and one other man by the name of Dr. Harry Krould, an Austrian emigre, who died 25 or 30 years ago, Tom and myself, we constituted the nucleus of a staff at the Library of Congress where we created “The Experimental Division for Wartime Communications Research.” It didn't make a very good acronym, but that was the long polysyllabic title of that division. [Laughter]

In the year or so that I was with them, we tore the Library of Congress upside-down, going through their foreign collections, and seeing what they had by way of newspapers, magazines, and books from foreign areas, as well as posters from World War I, which became my particular project at one point. Their foreign resources, save for Asian, were paltry indeed. Archibald McLeish was the librarian at that time and Lasswell was very close to him. Lasswell received a virtual “carte blanche” from him, which produced a most accommodating and cooperative Library of Congress staff. Soon more foreign newspapers, magazines and books began to flow in to the Library.

As a result of our efforts, mostly McKnight's and Lasswell's, we recruited to our division about 12 or 14 young Ph.Ds whose language and area skills covered the world. We got

Soviet experts, Chinese experts, Japanese experts, German, Italian—you name it, French, Latin American. I don't remember any Africanists, but we certainly covered Asia, the Near East, South American and Europe, both east and west. And the experiment with methods of content analysis proceeded apace.

Forerunner of Olom's USIA Career, 1941:Olom Moves to Foreign Broadcast Monitoring Services

My career then began to move about. After almost a year I left the Lasswell project and went to work for the Foreign Broadcast Monitoring Service, or Intelligence Service—I've forgotten what its name was at the time. It became FBIS. I think it started out as the Foreign Broadcast Monitoring Service at Princeton under Hadley Cantrel and Lloyd Free who were the major movers there. Lloyd Free came down and helped set up the Foreign Broadcast Monitoring Service in Washington. It was an independent unit working in the Federal Communications Commission at the time. I think that my recollection, sequentially, is correct.

I moved into analysis of British short-wave radio propaganda. I worked on the BBC under a Dr. Eric Estorick and, there again, we had experts in the analysis of Italian propaganda, German propaganda, Japanese propaganda, French, Latin American, etc. A lovely, lovely lady who died just recently and whom I hadn't seen in a long time, Audrey Menafee, was doing Japanese propaganda, along with a Mr. Maki. A guy who became one of the topnotch psychologists in the world, Jerry Bruner, who ranks with the greatest in the field of cognition and early learning was analyzing Italian propaganda with Sebastian (BV2) Degrazia a sociologically oriented political scientist who later wrote his classic on Leisure. Mr. John Gardner, who later founded Common Cause among other distinctions, was one of the analysts on Latin America at that time. We had a stellar group, similar in quality to the people at the Library of Congress project. I can't remember some of the other names, but these are a few.

Next Step: Shift to Nelson Rockefeller'sInter-American Affairs Organization

I stayed there for only 9 or 10 months and learned a lot about the analysis of radio propaganda. I went from there to help my former mentor, Walter H.C. Laves. Walter Laves was a professor of political science whom I had known at the University of Chicago and who was interested in the League of Nations many years ago. He was also the Mid-West Director of the League of Nations Association in Chicago. We, obviously, were quite well oriented towards the international scene and I shared his interest. When Walter came to Washington, he came to work for Nelson Rockefeller when Nelson was the Coordinator of Inter-American Affairs. The idea here was for Walter to set up some kind of a division of inter-American activities in the United States which would attempt to inform and educate the people of the United States about the peoples and countries of Central and South America. It was to serve as the reciprocal policy to “the Good Neighbor Policy.” So Walter said, “How would you like to come as my special assistant and help set up this operation?”

I said, “I think that sounds like a lot of fun.”

So I moved over from the FCC and joined Walter. I remember bringing to town a man named Garland Routt from the Public Administration Clearinghouse in Chicago who had come up in the administrative field. He was working for Frank Bane, the Director of the Council of State Governments. He also became a special assistant to Laves, as an executive and administrative assistant. (Gar Routt subsequently entered the navy, joined USIA's foreign service, retired to wine-making and died about two years ago. A long, trusted and wonderful friend.) We tried to do what I have described earlier in the United States. After a while, we decided that the way in which the war activities were multiplying —I don't know how much of this detail you want—we believed that what we were trying to do for the United States in the field of inter-American affairs ought to be expanded and extended to the rest of the world. Why only Latin America? We thought it would be a good

idea to do this in the then recently constituted Office of War Information where Elmer Davis was the Director.

And Then to the Office of Civilian Defense:Efforts to Educate U.S. Public on War Issues

Well, the powers that be didn't think it would be good to put such a program into OWI. They decided to create an entire new division in the Office of Civilian Defense under Jim Landis. We took our little division (about 9 or 10 people) from the Coordinator of Inter-American Affairs and moved physically to Dupont Circle where the staff was enlarged to about 25. The building is still there. We became a part of the Office of Civilian Defense and tried to expand our horizons. We worked on broader war issues. We thought it was important to inform and educate people in the United States about the war issues.

We had a two-pronged program. On the one hand we used the civilian defense councils that were located in every city, every town and every state. And on the other hand we used national organizations such as the Lions Club, Rotary, the labor unions, the business organization, farm groups, the Kiwanis, etc.

Sitting with this organization division was a special group that interested all of us—Laves, myself and a man named Francis Wilcox, a professor of political science and international law from the University of Louisville who later went on to become Chief of Staff of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. (I think he wound up his career in government as the Assistant Secretary of State for International Organizations and then became the Dean of the School of Advanced International Studies at Johns Hopkins.) Well, Wilcox joined Laves, Routt and myself and we thought that in addition to teaching and informing people about all these war programs that were emerging, why could we not get involved in the foreign policy of this country and in the kind of international organization that we might look forward to after the war is over? We started working with such organizations as the Carnegie Foundation, the Twentieth Century Fund, the Foreign Policy Association, the Council for Foreign Relations, and similar groups. We had many meetings which led to

the production of many little pamphlets, mostly by the NGOs, that is the non-governmental organizations, with our fiscal assistance as well as editorial help.

OCD Informational Effort: Congress Closes DownAnd Olom Joins the Office of War Information

That was a very intensive experience but it didn't last long because the Congress decided, when they heard about it, that they didn't want any part of us. (At least old Senator McKellar of Tennessee didn't, and he prevailed.) They closed us down and no longer could this program continue. After about nine months to a year of this, we were out of business. The question was, where next?

I was immediately asked to join something called the Bureau of Overseas Intelligence in the Office of War Information. There was a man named Lucien Warner there—a delightful man, very able. He came out of the Warner Corset Company, but he knew a lot about the world and he knew a lot about intelligence, training and propaganda. He was working for a Colonel Samuel Greenwell, who was the head of the Bureau of Overseas Intelligence at the Office of War Information. I was then brought in to replace Warner who was a division chief, working in public opinion and propaganda. I can't remember the division's exact name. Mr. Warner went on to head up the first training school for all Office of War Information employees who were going overseas. It was somewhere on Long Island. It was a hush-hush school and nobody knew where it was, but that was the last I saw of Mr. Warner until near the end of the war.

Early Exit From Office of War Information, Washington

I didn't last long with the Office of War Information. There is a little interesting anecdote here which might intrigue some of you. The colonel, a fine old time spit and polish officer, who ran the bureau was an old cavalry man from Texas. Samuel Greenwell was his name. We had picked up some information from various and sundry sources that the Nazis were walking around various towns and cities in Germany listening for people who

were listening to Voice of America broadcasts. The way in which they could tell that some German citizens were listening to American broadcasts was to listen for “Yankee Doodle.” Every time they hear “Yankee Doodle,” the SS went in and knocked these people off or dragged them away. The word came back, so I took this information and went up to see the Colonel.

I said, “You know, we're going to have to think seriously about eliminating this Voice of America song, this “Yankee Doodle Dandy” song, because it's resulting in the deaths of a lot of people.”

The Colonel was adamant. He said, “No, no, no. We've got to use “Yankee Doodle.” That's our signal.

I said, “Colonel, you're going to be killing people unnecessarily. I can't be part of this.”

He said, “Well, I'm sorry, but that's the way it is.”

I said, “Won't you take it up and let Mr. Davis decide?”

“No, it's my decision. I'm the head of the Bureau.”

I said, “Well, you can take the job, Mr. Colonel. I'm going elsewhere.”

So I left. I quit. It was one of my earliest experiences with the relationship between intelligence and judgments on policy matters.

To Office of War Information, New York

From there I went to the Office of War Information in New York where I hooked up with my old buddy, Tom Whiteside, whom I hadn't seen much of since the early days with Lasswell. He was running an operations intelligence for the Voice of America in New York and he asked me to come up there and possibly join him again. I went to New York, but became

a radio control editor instead. That's where I first ran into Walter Roberts, believe it or not. He was also a radio control editor. I can remember him so vividly because he always walked very straight, very erect at all hours of the morning—he and I both had the midnight to 8:00 a.m. shift, although I am not sure we ever spoke.

After the War, Several Years with Jacksonville College in Florida

I spent the rest of the war at the Office of War Information. I then left the government because I had gotten fed up with the bureaucracy. After a short stint with American Home Products Corporation in New York as an assistant to their Director of Public Relations, I went to work helping a little college get started in Jacksonville, Florida. (It is now the University of Jacksonville.) The men and women were coming back from the war under the G.I. Bill, and it was a fascinating time in which to try to teach.

This is turning out to be longer than I had expected—the story about some of the reasons why and how I got into this thing.

I spent the next four years in Jacksonville, Florida. Our two children were born there. The Korean War had broken out and I thought, because of my past experience with World War II, that I might be able to be useful to the foreign affairs agencies. So I decided that I was going to leave the college. I was sorry because we had just gotten to the point where it had become the University of Jacksonville with a four-year program. It's difficult, as most people know, to make a living teaching school, or it was at that time and, the State Department job was coming through.

1954: Back to Washington to Take A Job in theOffice of Psychological Intelligence in the State Department's Research and Intelligence Area

I returned to Washington and took a job working for a very fine man named Mel Ruggles who, at that time, had the very extraordinary title of Coordinator of Psychological Intelligence in the research and intelligence area of the State Department. He hired

me because he knew of my past experience in government, he knew that I had been involved in the analysis of propaganda and we were at “war” again. Therefore, this little unit of people, under the aegis of the Coordinator of Psychological Intelligence, was providing intelligence and research about the intelligence and policy problems in the rapidly developing International Information Administration within the Department of State. So you see, from the very beginning of what later became USIS, those who ran the foreign information program were seized with the need to obtain and use good research and good intelligence.

I became Mr. Ruggles' deputy until he left to become the President of the Council on Library Resources. When he left, I acquired that splendiferous title! Instead of working directly, however, for Alan Evans, who was the Director of the Office of Research, the Department placed between us a man named Evron Kirkpatrick. I mention that because Evron Kirkpatrick went on to do interesting things in addition to marrying a young lady by the name of Jean Robinson, who at that time was working in biographic intelligence but later became our Ambassador to the United Nations. I think Kirkpatrick was a professor at Minnesota when Hubert Humphrey was a student. He claimed to have done a lot by way of educating him into some of the mysteries of political science. Evron was fascinated with the whole field of foreign information and psychological intelligence. At that time there was an intense, major conflict between the CIA and the State Department as to who ought to have the major responsibility for collecting and processing intelligence information in this field of psychological intelligence. It was great fun.

I had this little staff of about 35 people which was funded by the Information Program. It was my job to make sure that we got as much out of the intelligence area as we could in order to support the purposes, policies and programs of the Information Program. This was very difficult at the time because the Department of State didn't have much of an appreciation for this kind of work. They didn't understand it. They felt it was an unnecessary excrescence upon the holy establishment, as it was then know.

Q: Can you tell me what time this was? This must have been after the Smith-Mundt Act, because if you were in Florida four years, it must have been about 1949 or 1950.

OLOM: Exactly. I came back to the State Department in January of 1951. I worked with Ruggles at least a year, maybe a year and a half. It was after that year or a year and a half, that he left, so we're talking about 1951 and 1952.

Q: This was when there was a USIE or perhaps it had become the IIA.

OLOM: It was the IIA.

Q: Charlie Hulten was the general manager, and it was still with the State Department.

OLOM: Right. I think it was after Benton, however, and it was Ed Barrett who was the Assistant Secretary of State for Public Affairs. I think Charlie Hulten was working for him, as I remember it. There was a man named Ben Bedaliciz who had been brought in at that time to do the evaluation work of the information programs. He also reviewed and evaluated our program in research and intelligence because we were feeding materials to him, other parts of the Information Administration, and later to the Defense Department.

There were problems on both sides. It was up to me to reduce and eliminate them. My role was not only to coordinate the production and the efforts of these 35 people that were scattered among the geographic areas as well as the functional divisions in the research and intelligence area of the State Department, but it was also to establish a liaison and work very closely with the information policy and program people as well as the Assistant Secretary's office. They (the information people) would tell me whether the materials we were producing were useful and adequate and whether the people I had were good or indifferent. It was my job to make sure that the monies IIA gave the Department of State's research area were being well spent and well utilized.

Olom's Work in Department of State's Research and Intelligence Area Leads Eventually to His Transfer to the New U.S. Information Agency

I stayed with this operation until the U. S. Information Agency was established. Before that time, I ran into a man named Henry Loomis, who—I think it was in 1952—was doing a study of the social science research being done by the foreign affairs agencies of the government. I think he was a representative of the CIA at the time. He became fascinated with what we were doing by way of supporting the information program with this information and intelligence which, by the way, also included biographic intelligence. There was also a liaison with other government agencies' intelligence and there was a library liaison. Henry's intrigue with our operation, which focused on foreign public opinion and communist propaganda, continued. When he completed his report, he apparently spoke highly of our operation and our activities so that, when the Jackson committee finally completed its job of reviewing the information function in relationship to the overall State Department mission, they concluded there should be established a U.S. Information Agency, and within it a research and intelligence capability. [In this connection, see Interview With Henry Loomis, Part II, “The Non-VOA Years”. Loomis says that the USIA Research and Intelligence Office was established not by the Jackson Committee's recommendation, but at his [Loomis] recommendation to then USIA Director Ted Streibert.] When Mr. Streibert became the first Director of USIA, he hired Henry Loomis as his special assistant. But Henry was soon handed the job of establishing an independent research organization, at that time called Research and Intelligence, a la State Department.

Loomis Asks Olom to Come Over to USIA With Many of Olom's Staff to Join USIA's Research and Intelligence Office

Henry began to talk with me about the possibilities of taking people out of the State Department and moving them over physically as well as functionally to the USIA operation that was located partly in the building at 1734 New York Avenue. What was it called?

Q: I believe that was the old Walker Johnson Building?

OLOM: Yes, it was the old Walker Johnson Building. Harry Hopkins had an office there many years ago. I remember Henry used to walk around on the seventh floor saying with some derision, “Where did you say that Harry Hopkins' office was? I think I'll take that.” [Laughter]

We moved from the Research area (of State) at 23rd Street and E to the Walker Johnson Building, and most of the people elected to come with us. I would say we brought over about 25 or 30 people. Then later on, of course, Henry Loomis moved the people from New York. The Voice of America's Research Library people came down with their stacks, morgue, and research materials. Before you knew it, he had created something called the Office of Research and Intelligence. He was its Director and I became the chief of one of his four divisions. I spent much time helping Henry organize that office.

We had very good people working with us, first-rate. The chiefs of the divisions that he brought in were good. He brought in Leo Crespi from Germany who had done pioneer work in polling German public opinion. Leo then joined the staff and I remained with Henry's operation from 1954 until June of 1956. Henry and I hit it off very well. We enjoyed our working relationship and, to some extent, out of the office, as well.

I had become somewhat disenchanted with the many years I had put in the government and I thought I'd like to go out and try the outside private world again. I had concluded that I would never make a very successful bureaucrat. I just don't think I had the temperament, just as I never really had the temperament to be a scholar. Although I retained my appreciation for the importance of both administrative management and scholarship, I

thought I'd like to try the outside world and see what would happen. Well, that never took place. [Laughter]

1956: Olom Becomes Staff Director of the U.S. Advisory Commission on Information, Then Chaired by Dr. Mark May

About that time, I received an invitation from Nancy Chapplelear, the executive secretary of what was known at that time as the U.S. Advisory Commission on Information, to come down and talk to the chairman of the Commission who was Dr. Mark A. May. Dr. May was looking for somebody, Nancy told me, who would serve as the Commission's first professional staff director. Nancy had served in an administrative capacity. She was very good at moving things and monies and people around. She had had some good experience at that, coupled with conference experience. They wanted somebody who had a more substantive capability in the field of communications, i.e., information and propaganda. Dr. May wanted to know if I would be interested in being interviewed. I told him that I had not thought of staying—I was really preparing to leave, but I'd be very happy to come down and be interviewed.

So we arranged an interview with Dr. May, who was the Chairman, and Judge Justin Miller, a very fine man who had been appointed by President Truman to be one of the first members of this Commission. He was a judge on the Federal circuit court of Appeals in the Mid-West area, I think, but I can't recall which area offhand. He was also a former President of the National Association of Broadcasters. The three of us had a long and very interesting conversation about what the Commission does, what I have done, and what interests me. One of the main things they kept asking me about was whether I would feel at home working up on the Hill and spending a lot of time there. This put a new light on things. I had not considered working on the Hill. I really wanted to get out in the business world and try my hand at it. But I said, “Sure. I'd be delighted.”

I had gradually developed a firm opinion that one of the main problems encountered by the foreign affairs public establishment of this country (there is a powerful private one too) is that the Department of State and who ever ran it and his immediate underlings seldom gave a hoot about what was happening on the Hill. They ran an independent empire, and they didn't think that there was much of anything significant that ought to be disseminated to members of Congress. Remember now—this was 1956 and there was really a great distaste for what was happening up on the Hill. I had a contrary feeling. I had always felt that the information program, the cultural and educational programs, as well as the Foreign Policy Department itself—the substantive part of the State Department—would be only as good as is its support up on the Hill and only as good as its understanding by the media of this country. I saw that there was a disinterest, if not a distaste, for both the work of Congress and the concerns of the people of the press and radio. I felt there was much that was left to be desired there. There was much that could be done and wasn't being done. When Dr. May and Judge Miller started talking to me about the possibilities of working on the Hill and doing something about cementing more effectively the relations between this Commission and the Congress, inasmuch, as they put it, “the Commission is a creature of the Congress” and we hardly know these people, they sparked my interest. You see, they had been in business now for eight years. They were created in 1948.I'd like to go back to the Commission's creation at this point, if you allow me, in order to pick it up, because I think something happened in 1948 which links my own career with the creation of the Commission in an ironic twist of personal as well as professional history.

You may recall that at the beginning of this interview I told you I had this tremendous admiration for a man named Harold Lasswell, who I thought was one of the world's greatest in the field of national and international political psychology. It turns out that in 1948 the Assistant Secretary of State for Public Affairs was a man named William Benton, the former Senator from Connecticut, the former vice-president of the University of Chicago and former partner in Benton and Bowles Advertising. When he was considering the possibility of asking the Congress for legislation to underpin the information activities

which had begun again after the war—and, by the way, the reason they began again, as some others may have pointed out in other interviews, stemmed from a foreign trip that was made by a Representative named Mundt from South Dakota and a Senator named Smith from New Jersey. They took a trip to Europe, and maybe other places as well, to see what was happening, because they had heard how effectively the Soviet Union and the East European countries were conducting their communist propaganda activities. They came back all exercised about the need to do something in order for the United States to be able to compete with these communist countries. As they were considering this legislation, they received a recommendation from Secretary Benton that, in addition to the creation of a law which would describe the powers and authorities of this new program, the International Information, Cultural and Education Program, there be created an advisory commission of prominent citizens. It turns out that the man who urged Mr. Benton to do so was good old Professor Harold D. Lasswell.

As I understand it, he did it for a number of reasons. He was concerned that establishing peacetime information program in the United States Government in the late 1940s, would meet with considerable skepticism on the part of the Congress as well as the press because there has always been an innate skepticism and distrust of government, let alone the information that it puts out. Some of the wire services as well as the rest of the press were sometimes hostile and always skeptical about the importance and need for an information program operated by the United States Government, even if that program was to be directed abroad. Dr. Lasswell felt, and apparently he persuaded Benton, that in order to allay concern and reduce the amount of criticism, it would be important—indeed it could be crucial he argued—to place a body of prominent Americans, well-known citizens with impeccable reputations on a Commission that would report to the Congress about how this new program was doing and how it could be improved, managerially and professionally. As my recollections tell me, that's the reason why this Commission was created.

When the Congress came to considering the creation of the Commission, they divided it up into two parts. The first was going to deal strictly with information and the other was

going to deal exclusively with the cultural and educational programs. You can see the divisions that took place at that time. They were carry-overs from the old State Department divisions, too, where radio, press, and motion pictures were placed together, but separate from the cultural relations and exchange programs. There was Ben Cherrington, who directed the Rocky Mountain Program and there was a man who was in charge of these programs working for Nelson Rockefeller who name was Kenneth Holland. He was first-rate and very well known at that time. Subsequently, he became president of the Institute of International Education. I wanted to go back to show you the origins and the reasons for the creation of the Commission as I understood them.

Q: Do you think that Lasswell's recommendation to establish the Advisory Commission was not only a substantive one, but one of putting a buffer between the U.S. Information Program and the Congress and the populace so that they would gain and perhaps give it a degree of respectability and that sort of thing? Was that his general purpose?

OLOM: You have said in much better words what I was trying to say earlier. Exactly. You have summarized it well. That is exactly why I think he wanted it in there. He did want a buffer. He did want an independent group that would be talking with the Congress, that the Congress could depend upon and say, “They can't do any terrible things down there. We've got this Commission that's examining them. They are men of great prestige and accomplishment.” And commission members took this part of their mission with the greatest seriousness and sense of responsibility. Yes, I think that was very well put.

I guess I was trying to tell you before I went back to 1948 that I decided to accept the newly created position of Staff Director, if it were offered to me. So in June of 1956 I became the Staff Director of the U.S. Advisory Commission on Information and the members at that time were Dr. Mark May of Yale who was Chairman; Irwin “Spike” Canham, Editor-in-Chief of the Christian Science Monitor; Sigurd S. Larmon was the President of Young and Rubicam Advertising Agency; Phillip D. Reed was the President

—or, perhaps by that time, Chairman of the Board—of General Electric; and Judge Justin Miller.

I came to this job, as you can see, as the first professional staff director, albeit with no foreign service experience. I had had about 17 years of experience in the universities, and in government in the field of domestic and international communications plus a brief period with a large corporation, but I had never served abroad. They were willing to accept me with that caveat, I guess.

Olom Sees Three General Periods Into Which Commission Efforts and Accomplishments Might Be Divided

There may be three periods that might help describe and delineate the work of the Commission.

A. 1948-1956: Commission Attempts to Help Congress and U.S. Public to Understand Need for A Government Information Program

First, there was the period between 1948 to 1956 when the Commission was trying to help the Congress and the American people understand the need for a government information program directed at foreign populations. The reports to Congress during this period were of that nature. Members of the Commission had taken trips abroad, they had seen what was being done in Europe and in Asia, in the Near East and Latin America by the very well-oiled communist propaganda apparatus. They became convinced that the United States must begin to develop comparable capability in this area. Then, in 1956 when I came aboard, I would say that the period between my coming to the Commission and just before my retirement—from 1956 until 1978 when Jimmy Carter was in his second year of the presidency when he finally appointed a new chairman and a whole new Commission—I would say that that was the second period. In other words, from 1956 to 1976 or 1978, a period of about 20 years, you had a Commission which had done two things.

B. 1956-1978: Gaining Credibility for Agency With Congress and Becoming More Constructively Critical of USIA

From approximately 1956 to 1978 there were two major accomplishments of the Commission. The first is that it did develop great credibility with the Congress of the United States, with the members of the Appropriations Committee as well as the authorization committees, the Senate Foreign Relations Committee and House Foreign Affairs Committee. The only exception that one might enter is the crusty and combustible Congressman Rooney from Brooklyn who had no use for anybody from the executive side of the government with the exception of J. Edgar Hoover. We never could really get Mr. Rooney to appreciate us.

I remember—this is a little anecdote—I was up there testifying on behalf of the Commission before Congressman Rooney. I can still remember his greeting, with his eyes, never once looking at me but looking down and saying, “Well, Mr. Olom, are you still waltzing that Commission around? Does the agency still have the Commission in its pocket?”

I would say, “Mr. Congressman, if you'll give me an opportunity to reply, I would like to say to you that not since I have come to this Commission, has this Commission been in the pocket of any agency including the USIA. We make great efforts to try to distance ourselves from the everyday intricacies and operations of the agency. We try to observe them, but we're not in their pockets. We write these reports to the Congress...”

I went on at some length to try to disabuse him of his firmly fixed notion. Then, I remember his saying to me at another hearing, “Well, I notice that your Commissioners have been waltzing around the world. They've been going to the Soviet Union. How many hundreds of thousands of dollars did that cost the taxpayers' money?”

I remember saying to him, “Well, Congressman, if you will give me an opportunity. I understand you are a fair man and, being a fair man, would you please give me an opportunity to respond to that?”

“Well, I am always a fair man. You may respond.”

So he gave me the opportunity, and I said, “Well, I'm very pleased to let you know, sir, that it didn't cost the American taxpayer one ruble or one nickel, because Mr. Reed who went was representing the American utilities industry in looking at the Soviet Union.” (This was about 1957 or 1958 when a few Americans first had the opportunity to go in there and look at the Stalin regime.) “The other,” I continued, “was Dr. May and he went with a bunch of psychologists who were trying to establish relations with Soviet psychologists. This was paid for by the professional associations. So you see, Mr. Chairman, I am very pleased to be able to plead not guilty to your charge.”

Whereupon he snorted and told me, “Thank you very much. That's all. Goodbye.”

Q: They probably deleted it from the testimony.

OLOM: Well, someday I'll go back and see if its around. Outside of Rooney, the Commission did enjoy a very fine relationship with other members of Congress. Later on, with the coming of Dr. Frank Stanton in 1964, during the Johnson Administration, we began to invite members of both Houses whenever we could get them for breakfast, lunch, or dinner, when members of the Commission would go over mutual ground with members of Congress. I understand that this tradition is one that's being kept by the present Commission. Congressional liaison was in effect.

The second thing that I think happened during this period is that the Commission not only became more substantive—it was substantive in the past—but it became more critical. Maybe that, in a sense, related to its credibility up on the Hill because very few people, outside of Mr. Rooney's accusing me of waltzing the Commission around, thought that

we were a public relations front for the agency. This was a great danger which I tried very hard to avoid. I thought that it was important to compliment the Agency whenever we thought that it deserved it and to criticize it whenever it was needed in order that the Report to Congress would be a balanced one. We made suggestions to the Agency which, in the Commission's judgment, would improve its programs and operations. We also made suggestions to the Congress concerning the allocation of resources to the Agency, including those Agency programs which might receive assistance from Congress, as well as those that had outlived their usefulness.

In looking back at this long period, once again, it seems to me that the above were two major characteristics of the Commission during that time period.

The third period is the interval between 1976-1978 and January 1980 when I retired. One might even include the Commission of today although it would be unwise for me to make statements about a Commission that I don't know very well, and whose meetings I have attended only once in nine years. Therefore, my comments are merely impressions rather than based on intimate knowledge.

C. January, 1976-78 and 1980: Enlargement of Commission Membership; Combining of Information and Cultural Advisory Commission to Be More Defender of Agency Than Impartial Judge

What has happened in the past 10 or 11 years is that (1) the number of Commissioners has increased from five to seven. That took place during the Jimmy Carter Administration. There was good reason for that because they at first cut out both Commissions—the State Department Commission, the one on International Education Exchange, and the Information Commission. Then they recombined them, giving the recombined Commission a horrendously long title. I think it was called the United States Advisory Commission on International Communication, Cultural and Educational Relations. You can't even make a good acronym of that. It was very bad.

The relatively young college president who came in to be its Director, Olin Robison was a very fine and very decent man who knew relatively little about this business and so acknowledged. He said, “Lou, what are we going to do about this title? We're going to have to do something about it.”

About a year, perhaps a year and a half later, we worked out the new title that is still being used, and it's now know as the United States Advisory Commission on Public Diplomacy. But the change in name was not merely another verbal, bureaucratic symbol. It called attention to a gradually changing world of diplomacy, in which the public's role played an increasingly significant role in the relations between nations.

To go back to what I was saying earlier—first, they increased the number of members of the Commission. Now I had mixed views on the subject because many years ago, when there were only five, some of the members of the Commission actually had gone to the Congress with the complaint that it was too much to ask the members of a Commission to come to meetings, that all five of them have to come, or four have to come for it to be a decent meeting. “It makes it difficult. Why can't we have more members of the Commission?” they asked.

So the members of the Congress responded affirmatively and said, “Well, we'll be glad to change the legislation and add two or four—do you want a seven-man or a nine-man Commission—if you think you can operate better.”

They said, “We would appreciate it.”

Well, six months elapsed and the Commission kept thinking about this matter. They rethought it, they regurgitated it and they finally concluded that their recommendation to increase the numbers on that Commission was a bad one. For they suddenly decided, “You know, when there are only five of us, we all bust our guts to get to meetings and we

almost always have five members of the Commission present. Only occasionally will there be four."

I remember when John Shaheen was one of the five members. He was a Republican appointee. John Shaheen would call in from all over the world. Be it Paris, Algiers, Djakarta or Tokyo, to find out whether or not a meeting was really going to take place because he was going to get there. And he would get there. He might fly 15 or 18 hours, but he felt—they all felt—a responsibility to attend these meetings.

So the Commission went back to the Congress and said, "Please overlook our recommendation. Please withdraw it. We think we've made a mistake and we've made the mistake for the following reason." And the proposed legislation was dropped.

I was left with the notion that the fewer you had—the five we had were superb—the greater was the sense of obligation, conscientiousness and responsibility. If you start increasing, you dilute the effectiveness and the feeling of responsibility. There was great value in concentrated effort by these five people who came at this problem from many different points of view. Regionally, they were different; professionally, they were different; politically, they were different. I think one of the greatest values of the Commission is that it is and should always remain a bipartisan Commission. If you have five people—if you have a Republican administration as we have now, three would be Republicans and two would be Democrats or independents, and vice versa if we have a Democratic administration. There's great value in that, because when there's a change of administration, the people who are members of the party of the new administration have almost immediate access, whereas a new Commission coming in would take a year to get themselves established, to figure out what's happening. There's great virtue here in overlapping terms and in continuity.

I would say the difference between the larger Commission that followed the years 1976 and 1978 and the past is that the larger Commission has tended to be more of a defender

of the Agency and its activities, policies and programs, than a critic. This is obviously not primarily a matter of mere numbers and this is not to say that they have not been critical, but there has been a tendency to defend the director and to defend the Agency's activities. I don't recall that our Commission ever defended any or applauded any director until after he had left the Agency. That was not its business.

I will also say that the Commission that we had between 1956 and 1976 or 1978 was one that put minimum emphasis on its own publicity. It did not seek much publicity for itself. Its reports were pretty standard. They were not glossy. They were not full of photographs. It was more important for the U.S. Information Agency and its activities and its accomplishments to be publicized in the American media—the American press, television and radio—than it was for the Commission. If the Agency is doing its job well and is being well respected—witness what's happened recently in China, in the Soviet Union and in Eastern Europe—it is recognized and appreciated by the U.S. media and the Congress. Finally, and at long last, people have begun to see that the cumulative effect of radio broadcasts and information does make a difference. When this occurs the Commission is very happy and satisfied. It has done its job.

Now that's a once-over-lightly of what I think have been the periods into which I arbitrarily put the work of the Advisory Commission. I don't know where to go from here unless you have some questions you would like to ask me. I had put down on a piece of paper what the role of the Commission has been as I have seen it during my term. Now, when you talk to Bruce Gregory, the Commission's present Staff Director, he may give you a slightly different view of a newer and more modern Commission.

Q: I think it's most important to get what you saw it to have been during your time because you are talking about your era.

OLOM: Right, I sure am. It's beginning to sound more and more era-ish, but no pun meant.

First of all, I think that the Commission itself felt very strongly that it was a creature of the Congress. It felt almost a primary obligation to the Congress, to level with it privately as well as in public hearings about what was happening and what ought to be done to improve America's capability in overseas information, education and cultural activities. That was the whole purpose of it.

Secondly, it did so through at least one other vehicle and that was in its written reports to the Congress. The Commission felt that this was a very important thing to do and they worked very hard at it. I can recall at least two, if not three, chairmen who went over these reports with me word for word. We read out loud each of these reports, spending a whole day at it. This was especially true of Dr. May and Dr. Stanton and, I think, Hobe Lewis, too. Mr. Larmon, a former copywriter, was a bear on the need for terse copy.

The third role of the Commission, at least as it conceived its role, was that it had a very special responsibility to the President of the United States. At least one or two members of every Commission that I served had a very personal relationship with the President so that, if there was ever any kind of a crisis of major proportion involving this Agency, or if ever there was any need to talk with the President, or if a report was completed and they wanted to talk with the President about the implications and meaning of the report, there was always somebody on the Commission who could and did arrange for a meeting of that kind. Finally, I must not overlook the importance of the relationship between the Agency's Director and the Chairman of the Commission. The record here has been uneven, but generally good.

Discussion of Degree of Access to the President By Various Commissions: Greatest During Truman/ Eisenhower Eras; Still Good in Kennedy/Johnson Years; Less So in Nixon/Ford and Carter Periods

Q: Are you saying that this situation prevailed all through the period of your incumbency in this position? I know that it was true in the case of the early Commission with Mark May

and Canham and that group. Was it so to the same extent in subsequent Commissions during your period of incumbency?

A.Truman Years

OLOM: I think so. Let me recollect a little on this. As I remember it, President Truman appointed Mark Ethridge as the first Chairman of the U. S. Advisory Commission on Information. As you may recall, he was the editor of the Louisville Courier Journal. The owner-publisher was Barry Bingham. There was a very close relationship between Truman and Ethridge, old, old friends and he could get in whenever he wanted. I don't remember about Dr. May's relationship with Truman after Ethridge left.

Q: I think May's were more with Eisenhower, probably.

B. Eisenhower Times

OLOM: More with Eisenhower, but less than other members who were on the Commission under Eisenhower's Presidency. Sig Larmon and Phillip Reed were very close to Ike. Phillip Reed died recently at the tender age of 92 and was one of the wisest and most effective Commissioners we ever had. He was an extraordinary industrial statesman and I hope, some day, somebody writes his biography not only for what he did as an American businessman and industrialist heading up the General Electric Company, but also for his overseas work during the war as the Economic Minister-Counselor in London, as an advisor to presidents, and as a member of this Commission. He displayed sagacity and an amazing facility to resolve the most thorny problems with a touch of humor and with smooth even-handedness. He was an extraordinary person, and it was one of the great joys for me to be able to work with him and hear him out on many things.

During the Eisenhower Administration Sig Larmon also had a very close personal relationship with the President. He was in there playing bridge whenever he could and whenever the President had time. They occasionally played golf together, and both

were involved in many other social events, including the Masters Golf Tournament in Georgia. Mr. Larmon's advertising agency was heavily involved in both of Ike's Presidential campaigns.

So Reed, and especially Larmon, could get in there. Their families were close. Mamie was very close to the Larmons. They tried not to talk business when they were at the White House. When they went to play bridge, they played bridge, and they stayed away from world-shaking events, both on the President's side and on the Commissioner's side. At least that's the story, as I know it according to Larmon. When they did have to go in on Commission business, they got in.

C. Kennedy Era

As for President Kennedy—during the Kennedy Administration, you couldn't have had a closer and more “inside man” than Leonard Reinsch. (For details, see Reinsch's most recent book “Getting Elected.”) Leonard Reinsch was the Executive Director of the Democratic Convention. He was Kennedy's top media man during the campaign. He had served previous presidents in a similar capacity. He was very close not only to Jack Kennedy, but to Bobby Kennedy. The relationship was very intimate and Reinsch's previously mentioned book describes it in detail.

D. Johnson Period

When we move from Kennedy to Johnson—the first thing that happened to the Commission after the tragic assassination of President Kennedy was that President Johnson got hold of Frank Stanton, “declared martial law” and made him—absolutely compelled him—to be the Chairman of the U.S. Advisory Commission on Information. He wanted him down there, by golly, so Dr. Frank Stanton called me up one day and said, “I'm going to be your new Chairman.”

I didn't know him at all and he was very close to Lyndon Johnson. He visited the ranch often. He told me that he built the desk that the President used in the oval room. Frank Stanton is apparently a cabinet worker, among many other things, for he is a man of many talents.

Q: I understand he was a woodworker by hobby.

OLOM: I gather. Stanton not only had an incredible array of talents, but his interests are worldwide and cut across the human spectrum of knowledge. He's also a fantastic photographer, a great collector and appreciator of art and sculpture, and a great endower of museums. He's contributed many wonderful works of art to New York museums. Well, I won't get into Stanton. He's just a modern, Renaissance man, and the reader will have to figure that out for him or herself. He remained very close to Johnson.

E. The Nixon Administration

Then after Johnson came Nixon. Well, if Frank Shakespeare couldn't get in to see Nixon, I can't imagine why not. I don't know whether he did or he didn't. I've heard conflicting stories. I do know that Frank Shakespeare was Nixon's television guy, and he was the man that Joe McGinnis wrote his book about: How the President Was Elector or How Television Elected President Nixon, or something like that. I've forgotten the exact title.

Q: The Making of A President?

OLOM: No. That was Teddy White. This is by McGinnis who knew Frank Shakespeare when he was a CBS account executive. The Nixon people coopted him, they took him from CBS and he became very close to Nixon, insofar as that was possible. During the Nixon Administration Stanton, especially during the first Nixon period, did not have the contacts with Nixon that Frank Shakespeare had. After Johnson, Stanton's contacts with the White House declined. That was partly due to the fact that, first of all, he wasn't Nixon's

original appointment although Nixon reappointed him. Secondly, CBS news and the Nixon White House were virtually at war!

Stanton's relationship with Nixon was more remote, to put it mildly. I think the reason is that the White House became very unhappy with CBS coverage of the Vietnam War. The Erlichmans and Haldemans and the fellow who wound up in jail and became a minister—Chuck Colson—were absolutely livid. They would get on the telephone and raise hell with Stanton because of the way in which CBS news was describing the political scene, both domestically and foreign. So Stanton was not their favorite character, and it wasn't too long—I think after Stanton's third term—he served nine years—when he retired. Frank Stanton made a tremendous contribution to the work of the United States Information Agency and to the American effort abroad. He had such a wide variety of talent, experience and ability.

After Stanton came Hobart Lewis. Nixon appointed Hobart Lewis as the Chairman of the Commission. Nixon once described Hobart Lewis (I can still remember this, I remember reading it in a Newsweek article) as the most brilliant editor he had ever known. Hobe Lewis came right out of the Reader's Digest. He was the fair-haired boy of the Wallaces and, apparently, had done a first-rate job in running and managing as well as editing that magazine. Hobart Lewis is a rather modest man, personally. He tends towards self-depreciation, but he's really a very decent, a very courageous, and very able man.

I remember the first time we met. He said to me, “You're going to have a hard time with me, Lou, because I'm one of those very ultra-right-wing zealots you will have on your hands. I'm a right-wing reactionary.” That's the way he put it.

I said, “Well, anybody who describes himself in that manner can't really be that bad. Is he, Mr. Lewis?”

Well, he wasn't that at all. He was a very conservative man, but he was not an extremist. He's a very able and very fine man. He knew Nixon and had access, and used it when necessary.

F. Ford White House

After Nixon came Ford—the last two years of Nixon's ill-fated second term. I'm trying to remember who was Chairman. I guess it was Hobe Lewis. It was Hobe Lewis who became Chairman, after Stanton left. Keogh came in to be the successor to Shakespeare. That became a more “even”—as opposed to “rocky”—period in USIA's history, although the Director got a few congressmen mad at him.

G. Commission Access to White House Deteriorated in Carter Administration

After Hobart Lewis came the election of Jimmy Carter. With Carter's election, as you know, the USIA was completely reorganized, the State Department integration took place: the two old commissions were abolished and a new Commission was created. A young man who had apparently been writing foreign policy speeches during the campaign, mostly for Cy Vance, as I understand it, and to some extent for Jimmy Carter, was appointed Chairman. This is why and when I believe the Commission's relative influence with the White House began to wane. Olin Robison did not have the same kind of direct personal access to the President of the United States, although he knew top White House officials. Oh, he could have gained access if he had insisted on it, but he operated mostly through Vance and through some of the upper layers of the bureaucracy and some of his political friends on the outside—in the White House mess, perhaps at the NSC. Then I got out in 1980. I really didn't get going with Olin Robison until late 1977. Then I really worked between 1978 and 1980. At the end of 1979 I told the chairman I was going to leave in January of 1980. So I can't give you any better assessment of his access to the White House. I don't think it changed very much.

Caliber of Commission Membership DeclinedBeginning with Carter Years

You see, from my point of view with the beginning of the Carter Administration, (a) they increased the numbers; (b) the men and women they selected were of a different order of achievement than the men and women of previous administration. From the very start, from 1948 to the Jimmy Carter period, we had absolutely first-rate people on that Commission. There was a dwindling of such talent, a diminution of such stellar people.

Just before you came here to do this interview, I was trying to remember some of the names of the people and maybe whoever gets into this interview at some stage of the game will be interested in knowing that we had people like Ethridge; Spike Canham; May; Phil Reed; Judge Miller; Ben Hibbs; who was the publisher of the Saturday Evening Post; Lewis Douglas, a former Ambassador to the United Kingdom, Franklin Roosevelt's budget director, a university president, and Chairman of the Board of the Mutual of New York; Jonathan Daniels, who was an author, newspaper man and an assistant to the president; M. S. Novik, who was a labor man and great friend and confidant of Mr. George Meany, President of the AFL-CIO. We had columnists like Clark Molenhoff and Bill Buckley, and authors like Jim Michener. We had Leonard Reinsch who was America's pioneer cable television man. These were men of great judgment, acumen and discernment—we had Ep Hoyt, the publisher of the Denver Post and the Oregonian, a wonderful man with previous experience in government. We had Dr. Stanton whom I've mentioned before, and we had two of this country's best people in the research field: George Gallup, Sr., pioneer public opinion pollster and founder of the Gallup poll; and Art Nielsen who founded the Nielsen TV ratings with his father. What better research people can you have advising top management of a government agency or a private corporation? My only regret is that the Agency didn't take advantage of their capabilities as much as I hoped they would. I rattle these men's names off to provide the reason for the feelings that I expressed earlier. This is not to say that subsequent Commissioners that have been appointed are not able people. They represent a different order of experience with a few notable exceptions. They

are still on the march. Their predecessors who had been appointed were mostly men and women “who had made it” and had looked at the world and at the U. S. Government from a slightly different point of view.

I don't know where you want to go from here, Lew, but these are some of my impressions and recollections. I started talking to you earlier about the role of the Commission. You asked me a question about the relationships with the presidents—how close were they?—and I tried to indicate to you what they were.

Stanton As Commission Chairman Began Developing Contacts With Cabinet Members

With the coming of Stanton, we began to make a deliberate—this was his idea—to make a deliberate effort of becoming familiar with Cabinet members. Secretary of State, Secretary of Defense, Director of CIA, Commerce, Labor, the NSC heads, all of these people, we would invite for breakfast, luncheon, or dinner, whenever we could get them, when the commission met which was usually monthly about ten or eleven months out of the year. My job consisted of spending a couple of weeks preparing for these meetings—agendas, recruiting guests, determining what was going to happen—then spending the next two weeks afterwards mopping up and then starting for the next meeting. That's the way business went, in addition to monitoring the Agency, the Congress, the media and relevant executive agencies.

Q: Let me ask you about those attempts on the part of Stanton and other members to broaden our relationships with the Cabinet and perhaps the President. Can you think of or cite any particular value or influence that really came out of that? Was there a tangible benefit to the Agency or were the indications of results too nebulous to be able to pin down.

OLOM: Let me reply in this way. When the Director of the Agency would move around in White House circles, in State Department circles, or in Cabinet circles, he would be frequently accosted by a Cabinet member saying, “By the way, we've met with your

advisory Commission the other day and we talked with them about this problem or that problem."

From a personal point of view, it helped the Director in his relations with these people in his knowing that there was social as well as substantive contact with members of the Commission. On occasion, there was follow-through in different directions, where the heads of these agencies, or departments would call upon Commission members for assistance in their own work. I'm trying to think of a specific, concrete thing that took place as a result of meeting with a particular member.

Meetings With Cabinet Produced Useful Feedbacks

There were many positive feedbacks from these meetings which I think redounded to the advantage of the Directors but they would have to say so. Maybe you'll be interviewing some of them. It will be interesting to see—if anybody is doing this—to probe the perspective of previous Directors who are still around, vis-a-vis the Commission, and whether the Director found the Commission to be worth a tinker's damn. I knew some Directors who couldn't give a hoot about the Commission. They resented the Commission, although they were polite about it. I'm the one who usually heard the gripes. It was done on an individual basis frequently. I'm now getting away from your question and thinking about how the Commission helped Directors. I can still remember Shakespeare calling on Stanton and asking him to pull up his sleeves and help them redesign what he felt was a lousy exhibit in Italy. I don't know the chapter and verse on it, but I remember Stanton taking time out from his work and flying over to Italy and getting into a train and going from one city to another, worrying about this exhibit, redesigning it, and putting new graphics into it. According to Shakespeare, it made all the difference in the world. That was a unique relationship between the former boss (Stanton) and a former underling (Shakespeare) where the roles were not reversed but were slightly different, where the former boss helped out the former employee who was now a presidential appointee and Director of the Agency. Stanton also had talked with—we had some FCC people in—I

remember his discussing with one of the Commissioners—I don't remember if we had Newt Minnow, somehow I can't remember whether Minnow came in—the whole question of why can't the networks in this country make their news broadcasts available to people overseas. You may know the story, but Stanton got his hands into this thing. It may have been after one of those meetings.

There was also at the same time a very imaginative memorandum that was kicking around [with a] suggestion from a fellow who was the cultural affairs officer in Moscow. He's a Sino-Soviet expert and an excellent officer. He's married to a Chinese woman. I sent this memo to Frank Stanton who got involved with all the networks, trying to get them to make their news available to USIA overseas. Well, he couldn't persuade the other networks, but he sure pounded the CBS executives' heads in to the ground and got the lawyers to lay off. They finally worked out a formula whereby most of what CBS was producing could at least be fed into the embassy. That doesn't sound like much now, but at the time it was a major breakthrough.

I have not been able to answer your question about a specific result. I think something once happened with a secretary of defense when the armed forces radio network went crazy. The Commission expressed its deep concern, and I can't remember who the Secretary of Defense was and when this took place. I remember we talked with somebody. It could have been the one under Nixon or Ford—I can't remember when the armed forces radio service or television service was putting out some pretty bad stuff.

Q: Weinberger was putting out some pretty questionable stuff. He was at odds with several other members of the administration.

OLOM: Yes, he was. I remember that, too, but somehow nobody said anything to him from the Administration. (I was out when “Cap” was Secretary of Defense.) We had talked to these Defense people in previous administrations about precisely this problem: too many officials speaking in the United States with conflicting policy views. Everything is hunky-

dory, if Cabinet members speak their piece and say what they believe. But as you well know, when we project this abroad, it sounds as if we are a cacophony of babbling cabinet administrators instead of speaking with one voice—so we've been through this with a number of them. Whether or not that's had any effect this was especially useful during the Eisenhower Administration, but I don't know about the Reagan Administration because—incidentally, the Caspar Weinberger who had dinner with us was not the Secretary of Defense, but the Budget Director in an earlier Administration. We had him when he was either the head of the budget bureau of the HEW Director, I've forgotten which.

Q: When he was Budget Bureau Director, his philosophy was the direct opposite of what it was as Secretary of Defense. There he was "Cap the Knife"—a terror who cut most every agency.

OLOM: He sure did. He was cutting it all over. This is another area where—I can say this to you on the record as far as the Commission's role is concerned. There was a time during the Ford Administration when the budget bureau, OMB, decided that USIA was going to take one hell of a cut. The USIA would be severely damaged. It made no sense. The Director was Keogh and he couldn't get anywhere, and the administrative people couldn't get anywhere. Finally, it took a call from John Shaheen—God bless him wherever he may be on cloud nine—to Jerry Ford saying, "Mr. President, have you heard that..."

No, he hadn't heard that.

"Well, you appointed me to this Commission—" This is John Shaheen talking to Jerry Ford, according to Shaheen. He says, "There's just no reason for this. We've been following this, Mr. President. They need a much better budget than your OMB is going to give to them. They had come up with figures that they had justified. We have seen them. We have looked at them. We have met with these people."

By God, they were overruled. We got the budget. USIA got the budget. Keogh may not wish to confirm this, but it was under his directorship. That's one time I remember the

Commission's saving the Agency's appropriations via the Presidential route. (Incidentally, it was John Shaheen who first said that USIA could not do an effective job because “it was under capitalized.”)

There were other times which I'd just as soon not put on the record, but this is one that worked.

The (Frank) Stanton Report; Mystery of Why He Recommended Agency Breakup

Q: Lou, we have often talked before about the famous, or infamous Stanton Report. What do you think led Frank Stanton—why did he, having been on the Commission for nine years—what was it that caused him to come up with that approach, that concept of how the Agency should be reorganized, or rather, dismembered?

OLOM: All I can do is give you my interpretation. I'm not sure I really know, because it was the only time in my long relationship when I had to differ with him publicly on a major issue. Our Commission stood firm on this matter except for James Michener who sided with Stanton.

Q: I just cannot guess what triggered his recommendation, but I am interested in getting your interpretation.

OLOM: It's really an interpretation rather than an opinion because—and the reason I say that is that I think back to Stanton's background. Despite the fact that he was president of a major network, he came up in the world as a scholar. He was a Ph.D. in psychology. He wrote a seminal dissertation in the field of communication research in which he showed how it would be possible to measure the effectiveness of broadcast programs by having listeners do certain things mechanically, considered to be very primitive now. It's much more sophisticated today with the Nielsen apparatus and methodology. At that time (middle 30's) it was a great advance, and he became known for that classic contribution. Although he was academically oriented, he was a sharp pragmatist. I don't

think he ever dreamed that he would leave the research part of CBS when he became its Director of Research. I imagine he must have looked forward to directing the greatest research program a man could envisage at that time. I understand, and this will have to be checked, that he remained Director of Research at CBS for a year or two. Paley became impressed and thought he was a terrific guy. He needed a company president and wound up catapulting Stanton from the job of CBS Director of Research to the Presidency of CBS. Stanton had become a much broader-gauged man by learning about everything from finance to operations, engineering, advertising and public relations, and what it takes to run a network. I would say that it's his earlier interests in academics—coupled with his continuing interest in the cultural, educational and artistic worlds—that persuaded him that government should not mix information with culture. He maintained his earlier interests. He stayed on most of the boards. He was a member of the RAND Corporation. He was a member of the Carnegie Endowment, as well as a lot of other business corporations and research organizations. He helped found RAND, I believe. He helped found the Institute of Behavioral Sciences somewhere (Stanford?) on the West Coast. I've forgotten where it was. He has always had an affinity for art, education, culture. As I indicated earlier, he's a kind of a Renaissance man in many ways. He's interested in academics. He's interested in research and science, everything from astronomy and space to photography and architecture—you name it. He has felt that the government is in the news and policy manipulation business. He has felt that government is perfectly willing, happy, and able to manipulate news, and people engaged in culture and education should not mix with these horrible “manipulators of news” people, but should seek the truth.

Q: From what you say, it seems he might be favorable to the way Fulbright viewed matters on the program side.

OLOM: Yes. Although he had problems with Fulbright, he appreciated Fulbright and what he did as the originator of the Fulbright program, but he didn't share many of Fulbright views on foreign policy. He would have been a Fulbright kind of guy. We used to argue this. For nine years we argued it and I thought that, when he retired, he had seen the light

so to speak. It is possible for these things to live on. The irony of this is that one of the best CBS programs is the Charles Kuralt program every Sunday morning which does a superb job of combining news, education, art, culture, music with commentary on everything from architecture to science and high technology plus the vagaries of Middle-Eastern politics!

Advisory Commission Act

The following is an addition: When Congress passed the Advisory Commission Act, I sought, without success, exemption from its more severe provisions. The reason was that by opening up the Commission's meetings to the public, the Congress made it virtually impossible for the Commission to talk frankly with Agency officers about their problems and difficulties. As a result it would reduce the Commission's ability to discern some of the weaker aspects of the Agency's work. I do not know how the present Commission has implemented this Act. Perhaps their more frequent meetings abroad with USIS as well as other embassy officials has helped provide an answer. Attachment To Interview of Louis T. Olom

Editor's Note:

In 1974, the President appointed a special Commission on the Organization of Government for the Conduct of Foreign Policy. The Commission was chaired by Retired Ambassador Robert Daniel Murphy, and included a number of highly prominent citizens, including then Senator and Majority Leader Michael Mansfield.

There were several appendices to this report. The one concerned here is Appendix S, written by Chester L. Crocker, then a professor, but later, during the Reagan Administration, Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs. The Appendix was entitled: The President's External Advisors in Foreign Policy. It evaluates presidentially appointed Commissions concerned with Foreign Policy. The discussion quoted below is the one dealing with the U. S. Advisory Commission on Information (USACI) of which Lou Olom

was the first professional Staff Director, a position he held from 1955 until his retirement in 1978.

After commenting that the USACI and its sister commission, the U.S. Advisory Commission on Education Exchange (USACEE), were rather subdued in their early years, because they were both controlled by the Department of State, which itself had ambivalent attitudes toward them, the Crocker Report continues as follows:

The information and educational/cultural exchange programs have been repeatedly reviewed and reformed, and this has had repercussions on the performance and interrelations of the two advisory commissions. The Eisenhower reorganization of 1953 —in which the USACI played a role—resulted in the creation of USIA as an autonomous agency, while it continued a confusing division of responsibility for the management of cultural programs. The USACI mandate was broadened at the expense of the USACEE in certain overseas cultural programs, only to be followed in 1954 by the creation of yet another body—the US Advisory Committee on the Arts—to advise the Secretary of State on arts programs abroad. To help iron out jurisdictional problems, the commissions met jointly for a period in 1954-55, but the USACEE was gradually confined to the field of exchanges. In terms of its mandate and the extent of high level interest in its activities, the exchanges commission clearly had less opportunity for impact, and it remained to some degree the captive of the State Department which controlled “its” programs.

The USACI did not share the same experience, after the establishment of USIA. Commissioners, who had grown somewhat impatient with official control of their activities, canvassed opinion in Congress concerning the utility of continuing the Commission. They were urged to stay in business. The Commission hired its first professional staff director to provide greater support of the group, and in 1955 it approved its own “Rules and Regulations” whose thrust was towards an enlarged role and greater independence. Though the Commission was still funded through a line item in the USIA budget, the Rules called for various symbolic steps to emphasize its own identity and spelled out the full

range of its powers including the right to testify and maintain independent contact with the Congress and to maintain a fully autonomous staff. Its mandate was described as covering every aspect of USIA programs, goals, methods, and organizational issues. Not spelled out but equally significant, the Commission has resisted any suggestion of USIA clearance of its public reports—an action which on more than one occasion has led to public replies by the USIA Director in the pages of the reports to Congress.

Observers and participants concur that the USACI has been one of the most effective advisory bodies in foreign affairs in the years since the mid-1950s. Its public reports have contained sharp criticisms of both Congressional actions deemed damaging to USIA efforts and of Agency actions, or the lack therefore. Its members and staff have developed an ability to play a delicate balancing act between the Agency, the White House, and the Congress in order to retain credibility while at the same time maintaining confidence. Though its meetings have fluctuated until recently between 6 and 12 per year, it has been able to perform privately as well as publicly—meeting as individuals or in a group with the President, attending internal Agency meetings, dialoguing on Capitol Hill, and preparing periodic “informal” reports to the Director, USIA. The USACI has focused with effect on a number of the items in its charter. It has played an informal inspectorate role in assessing various media programs for use overseas and through visits by members to overseas facilities and missions. Its offices have served as a funnel through which internal USIA issues can be aired. Members or the staff director have testified before Congress on the Commission's recommendations, providing further opportunity for it to demonstrate its autonomy. The Commission is credited with having affected USIA personnel decisions up to the Director level and with influencing the content of various programs and the degrees of emphasis given different regions.

Most observers have agreed that the Commission has been worth the $50-75,000 per year it has cost. The keys to its relative success would appear to lie in two areas. First, presidents since the early 1950s have taken it seriously enough to appoint members —and especially chairmen—who were not only vigorous and prominent figures, but

figures who were politically close to them. Under each administration from Eisenhower on, there have been persons on the Commission who could presume to have access to the President on personal/political grounds. Thus, the USACI has not had to rely solely on the inherent interest of a given president in USIA programs for its effectiveness. Such access exists both in its actual use and in its presumed availability to provide a special form of leverage not otherwise possessed by part-time advisors, no matter how prominent. While the President cannot “stack” the Commission immediately upon assuming office, the staggered terms of its members assure that he can appoint one new member (and hence, the chairman) within a year of taking office. Since the less well connected members have no comparable source of influence, this further assures that the Commission will look to him for its role and that he can consider it responsive to his basic purposes, if not always in agreement about specifics. However, though the USACI possesses this potential leverage, its realization depends—as in the case of intelligence advising—on the President's actual interest in the information program. This, of course, has varied.

Second, the relative success of the USACI lies in its ability to develop a measure of independence and, hence, a margin of maneuver between Congress, the White House and USIA itself. It is difficult to see how this autonomy could have developed without USIA's own autonomy from the Department of State; since both the Agency and the Commission exist independently of whatever role State might prefer to assign to them, the Commission is able to seek support for its efforts in Congress and the White House without directly opposing a larger “sponsor” agency. Equally important, the Commission's relative independence of USIA itself—it writes its own reports, sets its own agenda, runs its own staff, and conducts its own modest Congressional and White House relations—prevents it from becoming the “captive” of USIA.

The Mutual Educational and Cultural Exchange Act of 1961 (Fulbright-Hays) gave new recognition to this policy area, creating a separate Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs (CU) within State, and renaming the advisory body the US Advisory Commission on International Educational and Cultural Affairs. The new legislation provided for presidential

appointment of nine (instead of five) members on a bipartisan basis, and specified that it would “formulate and recommend to the President” policies for carrying out his authority under the law. Its reporting function was continued from prior legislation, but it was given the additional tasks of preparing a study on the effectiveness of past programs and of making “reports to the public in the US and abroad to develop better understanding of and support for the programs....”

End of interview